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for
SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR GUIDING A COMPUTER USER
TO PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. The Field of the Invention.

5 The present invention relates generally to the distribution of promotional material, and more particularly, but not necessarily entirely, to a system and method for guiding computer users to promotional material over online networks.

10 2. Description of Related Art.

It is common practice for businesses to market products and services by providing promotional material to potential customers. For example, businesses commonly advertise sales for goods and services in newspapers. Sunday editions of
15 newspapers regularly contain a supplement of advertisements from various businesses. Also, paper coupons which provide a discount to the consumer as an inducement to purchase a particular good or service are commonly distributed in newspapers, magazines, and direct mailings. Paper coupons
20 and advertisements are inefficient due to the cost of printing and distributing, and the fact that many of the coupons and advertisements printed and distributed are not actually used. The advertisements and coupons are

distributed to everyone who subscribes to the newspaper, for example, and not just the individuals who are interested in purchasing the particular goods and services being promoted.

Attempts have been made to increase the efficiency of coupon distribution by utilizing computer systems. For example, U.S. Patent No. 5,907,830 (granted May 25, 1999 to Engel et al.) discloses an electronic coupon distribution system. The system provides on-line coupon information for a potential consumer using a personal computer connected to a host computer. The potential consumer may specify product preferences or search and view coupons of interest to the consumer. The potential consumer may then download coupon information from the host computer to be printed. Despite this system providing some advantages over previously available systems, the system does not provide a simple method for guiding the potential consumer to the coupons which are available for being redeemed in a particular geographic area. Furthermore, the system does not provide for the distribution of weekly advertisements for a particular geographic area.

Similarly, U.S. Patent. No. 5,761,648 (granted June 2, 1998 to Golden et al.) discloses a data processing system issuing electronic certificates, including coupons, through

on-line networks of personal computers. The system displays active coupon files to potential consumers. The potential consumers are required to browse among the coupons to make a selection rather than being guided to the coupons which are available for being redeemed in a particular geographic area. Also, the system does not allow the potential consumer to search for advertised sales in a particular geographic area.

With the increasing importance of online commerce in many parts of the world, it is important to help consumers, even those who are hesitant to "go online," to utilize online resources when purchasing products or even to merely obtain information about products to purchase from a traditional local retailer. The currently available systems and methods disadvantageously do not address helping a consumer to become more familiar with online resources so as to encourage, and even entice, a consumer (who may have never desired to shop online), to utilize online resources to determine what is available from one or more local retailers.

In view of the foregoing state of the art, it would be an advancement in the art to provide a system and method for guiding a computer user to promotional material which is

simple to use and which the promotional material is grouped into easily distinguished categories. It would also be an additional advancement in the art to provide a system and method for guiding a computer user to the promotional

5 material which is applicable to a selected geographic area. It would also be a further advancement in the prior art to provide a system and method for guiding a computer user to promotional material which provides for efficient distribution of promotional material, and in which the
10 promotional material which corresponds to advertisements which appear in periodic publications.

OBJECTS AND BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In view of the drawbacks and disadvantages now present
15 in the industry, it is an object of the present invention to provide a system and method for guiding a computer user to promotional material which is simple and inviting for the computer user to utilize.

It is another object of the present invention to
20 provide a system and method for guiding a computer user to the particular promotional material which is applicable to a selected geographic area.

It is an additional object of the present invention to provide a system and method for guiding a computer user to the promotional material in which the promotional material corresponds to advertisements which appear in printed
5 publications, including periodically available publications.

It is a further object of the present invention, in accordance with one aspect thereof, to provide a system and method for guiding a computer user to promotional material which provides for efficient distribution of promotional
10 material.

It is an another object of the present invention to provide a system and method for guiding a computer user to promotional material in which the cost of providing the promotional material per customer decreases as the number of
15 customers increases.

It is an additional object of the present invention, in accordance with one aspect thereof, to provide a system and method for guiding a computer user to promotional material which groups the promotional material into easily
20 distinguished categories for selection by the computer user.

The above recited objects and others not specifically recited are realized in a specific illustrative embodiments of a system and method for guiding a computer user to

promotional material. As described above, the previously available systems are characterized by several disadvantages and drawbacks that are addressed by the present invention.

The present invention minimizes, and in some aspects eliminates, the above-mentioned failures, and other problems, by utilizing the methods and structural features described herein.

In accordance with the present invention, promotional material which is being planned to be distributed in a printed form can readily be prepared to be conveniently displayed to computer users, for example via a world wide web site conveyed to the computer user via the internet. In the case of promotional material which are generally distributed in the form of printed advertisements included with newspapers, such advertisements can be preferably be arranged in a form for display on a website for use by a computer user by: preparing the promotional material in a media independent form; storing the promotional material in an encapsulated post script file; manipulating the encapsulated post script file to a form for placement on a web page; creating a digital image of the manipulated encapsulated post script file and storing the digital image in a compressed file with key words including prices of the

advertised items; entering the compressed file on the computer database; and providing the web page for the computer user to access the promotional material. It is preferred that the computer user search for key words to find the advertisements for particular items, or select from a list of businesses extending the advertisements to allow the user to browse available advertisements.

Additionally, one preferred method of the present invention includes, for example either alone or in combination with the above-described steps: guiding a computer user to a website containing the promotional material; providing a list of broad geographic locations where the promotional material is available; directing the computer user to select from the list of broad geographic locations; providing a list of specific geographic locations where the promotional material is available; directing the computer user to select from the list of specific geographic locations; providing a list of categories of the promotional material; directing the computer user to select from the list of categories; providing a list of subcategories of the promotional material; directing the computer user to select from the list of subcategories; and providing the computer user with the promotional material. The promotional

material may be in the form of coupons which can be selected and printed to be redeemed at the applicable business.

Additional objects and advantages of the invention will be set forth in the description which follows, and in part will be apparent from the description, or may be learned by the practice of the invention without undue experimentation. The objects and advantages of the invention may be realized and obtained by way of the instruments and combinations particularly pointed out in the appended claims.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The above and other objects, features and advantages of the invention will become apparent from a consideration of the subsequent detailed description presented in connection with the accompanying drawings in which:

15

FIG. 1 is a diagram showing how a computer user is guided to a website containing the promotional material in accordance with one preferred aspect of the present invention.

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FIG. 2 is a diagram showing the preferred steps utilized to guide a computer user to promotional material via a computer network.

FIGs. 3A-3C are a representations of a preferred graphical images presented to a computer user via a computer network with FIG. 3C providing a diagram of categories in which the promotional material can be grouped to easily distinguish the different categories of promotional material for the computer user.

FIG. 4 is a diagram the preferred relationship between the appearance of a printed publication and the appearance of a computer display configured in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 4A is a diagram showing preferred steps utilized to arrive at the relationship between a printed publication and a computer display represented in FIG. 4.

FIG. 4B is a diagram showing preferred steps utilized to prepare weekly advertisements for presentation to a consumer via the internet in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. 5 is a diagram showing the different ways a computer user can access promotional material in the form of weekly advertisements utilizing the present invention.

FIG. 6 is a schematic diagram of a web page listing entities offering promotional material which can be selected

to display weekly advertisements in keeping with one aspect of the present invention.

FIG. 7 is a schematic diagram of an exemplary layout of a web page corresponding to a printed publication including
5 weekly advertisements.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

For the purposes of promoting an understanding of the inventive principles of the invention, reference will now be
10 made to the embodiments illustrated in the drawings and specific language will be used to describe the same. It will nevertheless be understood that no limitation of the scope of the invention is thereby intended. Any alterations and further modifications of the inventive features
15 illustrated herein, and any additional applications of the principles of the invention as illustrated herein, which would normally occur to one skilled in the relevant art and having possession of this disclosure, are to be considered within the scope of the invention claimed herein.

20 Definitions of key terminology used herein will now be provided.

"Promotional material" as used herein refers to any type of marketing material such as for example, coupons,

discounts, advertisements, incentives, or any other such implement known to those skilled in the art of marketing, to promote goods or services.

5 "Computer user" or "consumer," as referred to herein includes those who utilize electronic devices, including those currently known or known in the future, which are capable of conveying information over a distance and allowing access to promotional material.

10 "Computer network" as used herein includes a system of electronic devices, including those currently known or known in the future, capable of communicating information between spaced apart locations, including information representing promotional material.

15 "Computer" as used herein includes any device used to manipulate and display textual or graphical material to a computer user, including devices now know or which become available in the future, with the industry standard PC compatible computer being one preferred example of a computer within the meaning of that term as used herein.

20 "Weekly advertisements" as used to herein include advertisements which are capable of being distributed on a periodic basis such as in a Sunday supplement in a newspaper, for example. However, the term weekly

advertisements is not limited to those advertisements distributed only on a periodic basis, but include any advertisement known to those skilled in the art whether distributed periodically or distributed randomly or distributed only once.

"Website" as used herein refers to data stored electronically which is accessible through a computer network. Other related terminology used herein is described more fully in the publications: Black, Uyles, Internet Architecture An Introduction to IP Protocols (Prentice Hall 2000) and Mudry, Robert Jon, Serving the Web (Coriolis Group 1995), which are now incorporated herein by reference in their entireties.

Referring now to FIG. 1, a block diagram shows one preferred arrangement, in accordance with the present invention, how a consumer or computer user is guided through a computer 14 to a website 12 containing promotional material. The present invention provides great improvements over the previously available systems by making it easier for the computer user to find the desired promotional material. The website 12 is preferably advertised through known media 16 such as television, radio, magazines, newspapers, other websites or referrals. Referrals can be

promoted by, for example, offering incentives to consumers who refer other consumers to the website 12 and in other ways know to those skilled in the art.

Also, advertisements in the form of banner ads having
5 links to the website can be placed on websites of affiliates
18. When a consumer is on the website of an affiliate 18,
the banner ad is displayed. The consumer can automatically
access the website 12 by activating link ad in a manner
known in the art such as clicking on the banner ad with a
10 mouse. Affiliates can be compensated based on the number of
consumers registering with the promotional material website
through the affiliate website. This will give others an
incentive to promote the website 12. Affiliates with top-
tier sites having consistently higher traffic and larger
15 subscriber bases are referred to as partners 20. Partner
sites function similar to other affiliate sites but can be
offered additional incentives due to their higher traffic.

The computer 14 is connected to the hosts 18, 20 and
the website 12 through communication links 11 which include
20 any variety of communication link known presently or which
become available in the future for communicating electronic
data on a computer network.

The following steps may be desirably carried out alone, or in combination with other steps described herein, as will be readily recognized by those skilled in the pertinent art. Once the consumer has accessed the website 12, the system

5 preferably guides the consumer through three readily followed stages to access the relevant promotional material as shown in FIG. 2. Stage one, shown generally at 22, includes selecting the appropriate geographical location. First a list of broad geographic locations is provided 23, and the consumer is directed to select a broad geographical
10 location 24 from the list. Broad geographic locations as referred to herein include categories such as states, countries, provinces, nations, or any other geographic location characterized by a similar large geographic area. It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that
15 other types of broad geographical locations can be used within the scope of the present invention.

After selecting a broad geographic location, a list of specific geographic locations 25 in the selected broad
20 geographic location is displayed, and the consumer is prompted to select a specific geographic location 26 from the list. Specific geographic locations as referred to herein include, for example, cities, towns, counties,

boroughs, zip code areas or any other geographic areas characterized by a similar size as the specific geographical locations listed. Specific geographical locations are of a size such that a consumer would typically travel distances within the specific geographical location to shop for goods and services. It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that other types of specific geographical locations can be used within the scope of the present invention.

Stage two, shown generally at 28, involves choosing a category of the desired promotional material. A list of categories 29 of the promotional material is displayed for the consumer.

FIGs. 3A-C provide preferred graphical arrangements for presenting information to a computer user. It will be appreciated that FIGs. 3A-C are merely exemplary of some aspects of the present invention and not all the features of the present invention are represented therein and that other information, which will be described later herein, can also be preferably included in the material which is presented to the computer user. As those skilled in the art will appreciate, any of the computer programs known in the industry as world wide web browsers are used in connection with the present invention.

As shown in FIG. 3C, the promotional material may be organized in numerous different categories. For example, the categories may include: food, restaurants, clothing, gifts, books, travel, business services, art, collectibles, personal care, entertainment, sports, furniture, electronics, vehicles, real estate, home improvement, professional services, money, finance, pets, transportation, beauty, fitness, leisure, technology, or communications. As those skilled in the art will appreciate, other categories can be used within the scope of the present invention to organize the promotional material. The consumer is directed to select a category of promotional material from the list 30 (see FIG. 2). As a consumer selects a category, a list of subcategories is displayed 31. The consumer is directed to select from the list of subcategories 32 to further define the area of interest of promotional material.

Referring again generally to FIG. 2, once the subcategory is selected, the stage three begins, shown generally at 33. Stage three involves providing a list of promotional material 34 available in the selected geographical location and the selected category. The promotional material may be in the form of coupons, discounts, or cash back offers, for example. The consumer

is directed to select the desired promotional material 35,
whereupon coupons may be printed from a printer connected to
the computer. The coupon may then be redeemed for a
discount on goods or services at the applicable place of
5 business. The discounts and cash back offers are available
by purchasing goods or services through computer links to
business websites from the displayed promotional material.

With an understanding of the forgoing techniques for
guiding a computer user to promotional materials, a
10 description of a further improvement provided by the present
invention, referred to herein as the weekly advertisement
portion of the present invention, will now be explained.
Consumers are accustomed to browsing advertisements in a
variety of printed forms such as in newspapers or magazines
15 for example. Sunday editions of newspapers often have a
supplement of advertisements from various businesses,
principally retailers, including goods and services on sale
in a particular geographic area. However, a consumer must
obtain a copy of the newspaper to receive the weekly
20 advertisements. Furthermore, the advertisements are not
organized in a manner to allow easy access to the desired
advertisements, and the advertisements are cumbersome to

save and are often discarded before their usefulness is finished.

The present invention is very beneficial to consumers since advertisements are placed on a website for easy
5 access. Furthermore, the advertisements appear in a form which is familiar to the consumers since the advertisements appear in a format which is well-known to consumers which are acquainted with the printed advertisements.

The website 12 (see FIG. 1) which is implementing the
10 present invention displays a list of offerors 60 of the promotional material, as shown in FIG. 6. Offerors 60 include entities associated with the promotional material such as retailers, business establishments, restaurants, government agencies or any other entity desiring to provide
15 promotional material. The consumer may browse the listed offerors 60 of promotional material and select a particular offeror by clicking on it with a mouse to display the associated promotional material as shown in FIG. 7. FIG. 7 is a diagrammatic representation of one preferred
20 arrangement of a graphical interface presented to a computer user in accordance with the present invention, for example a page encoded in HTML conveyed via the world wide web on the internet as is well-known to those skilled in the art. The

associated promotional material may have any desired appearance, but preferably has the same appearance as promotional material printed in weekly advertisements, such as those included in Sunday editions of newspapers.

5 Further information regarding the computer language HTML can be obtained from publication: Holzner, Steven, HTML Black Book (Coriolis Group 2000), which is now incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

Referring now to FIG. 7, the promotional material
10 presented to a computer user may include a page 61 having an image 62 of an item on sale, a description 64 of the item on sale, and the price 66 of the item, for example, all of which corresponds to the appearance of corresponding items in a printed weekly advertisement. This format for
15 presenting promotional material to a computer user is already familiar to the computer user (from the computer user's association with printed advertisements) and allows the computer user to easily find advertisements the computer user may have seen elsewhere in a printed form. In
20 accordance with the present invention, the described method and arrangement is also much more convenient for the consumer since the consumer need not purchase and save newspapers and magazines to access desired promotional

material. Once the computer user arrives at the web page represented in FIG. 7, the computer user may browse by clicking through various pages of the promotional material and also click on a portion of a page to enlarge it for easier viewing and, if desired, printing.

Those skilled in the art will appreciate the great advance the techniques described herein provide over those which have been heretofore available. The methods and arrangements described herein can be utilized individually or combined to provide the greatest benefit, as will be appreciated by those skilled in the art having an understanding of the present invention.

As discussed earlier, many consumers utilize print advertisements, such as newspapers, to learn of products which are available for purchase from nearby retailers and to decide which products the consumer will purchase and where the consumer will purchase those products. In particular, in consumers utilize the Sunday edition of a local newspaper to determine which products will be purchased and from which local retailers those products will be purchased from. Many such advertisements are those which appear in a discrete "pull out" portion of the Sunday edition of the newspaper referred to as a "Sunday

supplement." Generally, each Sunday supplement contains advertisements for only one retailer. Thus, a Sunday edition of a newspaper may contain many Sunday supplements and the Sunday supplements may comprise a significant
5 portion of the bulk of the entire Sunday edition of many newspapers.

While the sector of the economy referred to as "electronic ecommerce" or "ecommerce" is growing at an greatly increasing rate, many consumers are hesitant to "go
10 online" to purchase products or even to merely obtain information about products to purchase from a traditional "bricks and mortar" local retailer. In accordance with one aspect of the present invention, the present invention advantageously provides a method of guiding computer users
15 to, and through, an on line version of the Sunday supplement advertisement for one or more retailers. The computer user, even a consumer who is hesitant to go online to obtain information about products available for purchase, are presented with familiar and easy to use interfaces, as will
20 next be explained.

Reference will next be made to FIG. 4 which is a diagrammatic representation of a preferred relationship between the appearance of a printed publication 70A and the

appearance of a computer display 70B of a computer user (not represented) configured in accordance with the present invention. The printed publication 70A can be any type of printed publication but it is preferred that the printed publication 70A is one page out of a advertising supplement which is distributed with a periodical publication, such as a Sunday edition newspaper. The printed publication has a graphical configuration which is created by the individual graphic images represented by the boxes (72A, 74A, 76A, 78A, 80A, 82A, 84A, 86A, 88A & 90A). In addition to the graphic images, the graphical configuration preferably includes textual material, which may occupy the same position on the printed publication as the graphic images (72A, 74A, 76A, 78A, 80A, 82A, 84A, 86A, 88A & 90A) or the textual material may be positioned on the printed publication independently of the graphic images. It will be appreciated that some printed publications may lack graphic images and may contain only textual material and the present invention also has application in such printed publications but it will be appreciated that the promotional materials which benefit the most from the present invention nearly always include graphic images of products which are available for purchase.

The present invention advantageously presents to a computer user a graphical layout page which is directly correlated with the appearance of the printed publication as shown in FIG. 4. In FIG. 4, a computer display 70B of some type is represented. The computer display can be any device which is capable of providing a visually perceptible representation of graphical or textual material, as is well known in the art.

In the preferred example represented in FIG. 4, each graphic image (72A, 74A, 76A, 78A, 80A, 82A, 84A, 86A, 88A & 90A) included in the printed publication 70A also has a corresponding graphic image (72B, 74B, 76B, 78B, 80B, 82B, 84B, 86B, 88B & 90B) generated on the computer display 70B. It is to be appreciated that it is presently preferred that the computer display 70B is presenting a website which has been generated and transmitted to the computer display 70B in accordance with the present invention.

Importantly, the arrangement of the graphic images (72B, 74B, 76B, 78B, 80B, 82B, 84B, 86B, 88B & 90B) generated on the computer display is familiar to the computer user, who is assumed to be familiar with either the exact printed publication 70A or familiar with other printed publications which are similar to the printed

publication 70A. The relationship between the printed publication 70A and the computer display 70B makes the computer user comfortable and encourages the computer user to browse and examine the information provided on the computer display. It will be appreciated that due to differences in the computer displays, the appearance of the images on the computer display may not be identical to the appearance of the corresponding images in the printed publication, due to many different technical considerations, but the computer user will still perceive what is shown on the computer display as corresponding to what is included the printed publication.

The computer user is able to change the computer display, for example by clicking on a page button 92 to see another view another representation of another page of the printed publication 70A. It is preferred that an entire printed publication be reproduced in accordance with the present invention so that if a computer user remembers seeing a particular product advertised in a Sunday supplement from the previous weekend, the computer user will be able to view one page after another, in sequence, on the computer display. Also, the computer user can search for

text and keywords in accordance with the present invention using techniques well-known in the art.

In FIG. 4 the each of the graphic images (72A, 74A, 76A, 78A, 80A, 82A, 84A, 86A, 88A & 90A) included in the printed publication 70A also has a corresponding graphic image (72B, 74B, 76B, 78B, 80B, 82B, 84B, 86B, 88B & 90B) generated on the computer display positioned in a location very similar to the position of the images provided in the printed publication 70A. It will be appreciated that it is within the scope of the present invention to provide only some corresponding graphic images (for example, 72B, 74B, 76B) on the computer display 70B and to provide them in an arrangement which is not strictly the same as that provided in the printed publication 70A). The relationship between the appearance of the computer display 70B and the printed publication 70A should be sufficiently correlated to allow the computer display 70B to be familiar to the computer user.

Reference will now be made to FIG. 4A to further describe the preferred techniques used to generate and convey to the computer user the computer display 70B represented in FIG. 4. The preferred method of presenting promotional material to a computer user described herein is

just one possible arrangement for carrying out the present invention.

Referring now to FIG. 4A, as represented at step 94A, a printed publication is selected. The printed publication preferably includes an exemplary first page which will be used to describe the steps represented in FIG. 4A, but most printed publication will have multiple pages which are subjected to the method of the present invention. Still, a single page can be selected from a printed publication, from somewhere in the printed publication without regard to the order of pages within the printed publication, and still receive the benefits of the present invention. The printed publication may be any number of different types of printed publications, including a newspaper; a magazine, and an advertising supplement, each of which preferably include a plurality of pages. While not intended to be limiting of the scope of the present intention, the present invention does have the greatest benefit when the graphic images include images of products available for purchase. The selected page from the printed publication preferably has a graphical configuration including at least: a first graphic image positioned in a first location on the first page, a second graphic image positioned in a second location on the

first page; and, a third graphic image positioned in a third location on the first page.

A graphical layout page is prepared as indicated at step 94B. The graphical page layout is adapted for display
5 on a computer display (see 70B in FIG. 4). The graphical layout page includes: a first graphical position located in a position on the graphical layout page which corresponds to the first location on the first page; a second graphical position located in a position on the graphical layout page
10 which corresponds to the second location on the first page; and, a third graphical position located in a position on the graphical layout page which corresponds to the third location on the first page. Thus, the graphical layout page appears familiar and closely similar to the appearance of
15 the printed publication (70A in FIG. 4). In particular, the first, second, and third graphical positions are located in their respective positions on the graphical layout page to create a second graphical configuration. The visual impression conveyed by the second graphical configuration to
20 the computer user is recognized as the first graphical configuration (of the printed publication) by the computer user when the graphical layout page is viewed on a computer display (70B in FIG. 4).

It is preferred that the graphical layout page be encoded in computer code which will cause the computer display (70B in FIG. 4) to provide the correct layout to the computer user, such as those computer languages well-known in the art as HTML (see step 94C in FIG. 4A), XML, and any other language or technique which is now known, or which becomes known in the future, to convey graphical and textual material via a computer network. The graphic images are preferably fixed in digital files having a format compatible with the well-known tiff, jpeg, and gif formats (step 94E in FIG. 4A). It is also preferred to provide the computer user with key words and numeric information which can be searched to find corresponding graphic images on the computer display. The key words and numeric information are preferably embedded in the graphical layout page (step 94D in FIG. 4A).

It is preferred that when a computer user clicks (or takes other appropriate affirmative action) on the graphical images on the computer display, the computer user is directed to an enlarged graphical image which appears on the computer display.

Included in the method of the present invention is transmitting the graphical layout page to the computer

display using whatever protocol, either now available or available in the future, to the computer display (70B in FIG. 4), for example utilizing the TCP/IP protocol which is currently the standard on the internet (step 94F in FIG.

5 4A). As the computer user desires to view additional images corresponding to pages of the printed publication (70A in FIG. 4) additional pages are transmitted to the computer user via the internet (step 94G in FIG. 4A).

Preparing the promotional material for placement on the
10 website 12 is readily accomplished by those skilled in the art with an understanding of the principles discussed herein, as will now be explained. As shown in FIG. 4B, a business or offeror who desires to provide promotional material in the form of advertisements prepares the
15 promotional material in a media independent form 36 such as a file compatible with the QUARK XPRESS™ format which is well known to those skilled in the graphic arts industry. A media independent publication is a master version of the content which can be quickly and efficiently delivered
20 through different media such as print, on the Web, and through wireless devices.

Next, the promotional material is preferably stored in an encapsulated postscript file 38, commonly referred to as

an eps file. An encapsulated postscript file is generally used for graphics files that are to be incorporated into other documents and includes information such as the bounding box, page number and fonts used. An image manipulation program such as PHOTOSHOP™ is then preferably used to manipulate the encapsulated postscript file to a form for placement on a web page 40. Then a digital image of the manipulated encapsulated postscript file is preferably compressed and stored in a file 42 commonly referred to as a jpg file (Joint Photographers Expert Group). The jpg file includes a digital image for inclusion on a web page, for example providing graphic images to be seen in the advertisements. Also included in an appropriate format, for example HTML, keywords and prices for each item advertised are also included. The keywords are preferably any suitable descriptive words corresponding to the item which would enable a computer user to find the item by performing a search for the keyword using search tools or search engines. The jpg file is next preferably entered on a computer database 44 so that the promotional material can be accessed through a web page 46 connected to a computer network.

Further information regarding the use of the QUARK
XPRESS™ and PHOTOSHOP™ programs can be found in the
publications: Bouton, Gary David, Bouton, Barbara & Kubicek,
Gary, Inside Adobe Photoshop 5.5 (New Riders Publishing
5 2000) and Assadi, Barbara, Gruman, Galen & Cruise, John,
Quark Xpress 4 for Dummies (IDG Books 1998), which are now
incorporated herein by reference in their entireties.

Using the techniques and structures described herein, a
computer user is directed to the promotional material in the
10 form of weekly advertisements 50 from a particular business
or offeror in various ways as shown in FIG. 5. One
procedure a computer user is directed to desired promotional
material is by performing a search 52 on key words
applicable to the promotional material of interest. Also,
15 businesses or offerors 60 of promotional material, such as
franchises or national chain stores with wide geographic
coverage, are listed on the web page. As indicated in FIG.
5, a computer user can select such businesses listed to
display a listing of promotional material available 54.
20 Also as represented in FIG. 5, computer users can also
select a geographic location 56, in a similar manner as
described in stage 1 described above, to retrieve a list of
local business establishments with promotional material

available. A local business can then preferably be selected from the list to view the promotional material for the local business 58.

While the above-provided description provides one
5 skilled in the art with all the guidance necessary to make
and use the present invention, attached hereto, and
incorporated herein by reference, is a Programming Code
Appendix, which will provide one skilled in the pertinent
art further preferred examples of the structures and
10 techniques used to carry out the present invention. The
programming code provided in the attached Programming Code
Appendix is exemplary of the code used to implement portions
of the methods and structures described in connection with
FIGS. 1-7.

15 In view of the foregoing, it will be appreciated that
the present invention provides a system and method for
guiding a computer user to promotional material which is
readily followed and which groups the promotional material
into easily distinguished categories. The present invention
20 also provides the user with a familiar easily used computer
database interface which corresponds to the visual
appearance of advertisements when they appear in commonly
distributed printed form. Thus, the present invention also

provides a system and method for guiding a computer user to the promotional material which is applicable to a selected geographic area, and in which the promotional material includes weekly advertisements. The present invention also provides a system and method for guiding a computer user to the promotional material which provides for efficient distribution of promotional material.

It is to be understood that the above-described arrangements are only illustrative of the application of the principles of the present invention. Numerous modifications and alternative arrangements may be devised by those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention and the appended claims are intended to cover such modifications and arrangements. Thus, while the present invention has been shown in the drawings and fully described above with particularity and detail in connection with what is presently deemed to be the most practical and preferred embodiment(s) of the invention, it will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art that numerous modifications, including, but not limited to, variations in size, materials, shape, form, function and manner of operation, assembly and use may be made without departing from the principles and concepts set forth herein.